

Tally Marks by **theamiableanachronism**

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Summary: A soulmate AU where a tally mark shows up on your wrist when you meet your soulmate, starring a post-episode eight Mike Wheeler.

Tally Marks

For weeks Mike couldn't even look at his wrist. It helped that it was the middle of winter, so he had plenty of long sleeves to pull down over it, but you couldn't go your whole life not looking at your wrist. Even if you preferred remembering when that little line was red and how you'd thought it was just a scratch because it couldn't be THAT. Or when it turned black and THAT was more unbelievable than it being red.

Because he knew he'd have to look at how thin and white it had become, a scar of what had been. And although it wasn't a real scar, it still hurt.

But he had to know. So he checked, one late night at the end of December when everyone else had gone to bed and the house was quiet.

He sat on the edge of his bed for what felt like forever, a flashlight clenched between his teeth so he wouldn't have to turn on a lamp and alert his mom that he was still awake. It would be too hard to explain why. His free hand was holding onto his sleeve, not pulling it up, just holding it. Putting off the inevitable.

He'd never really asked anyone about tally marks. He'd never had a reason to ask. All he knew was from what he'd picked up from TV and those cheesy romantic movies his mom liked to watch and cry over. Those and other people's wrists. But no one his age had any tally marks on their wrists. Or at least they didn't talk about them, so he'd always thought it was a grown-up thing, one of those things you got when you got married or something. But then some of his parents' friends were married and had no marks. Some had a few, red and black, unrequited and requited. There were some old people like his grandparents who had matching black ones until grandpa died. Now grandma had a white scar where the black mark used to be.

He looked down at the wrist still covered by his sleeve and felt that sick swooping feeling, like his stomach was about to drop out of his body. That's why he'd been putting this off. Every time he thought about checking, all he could see was a tiny white scar and he didn't

want to think about it. He didn't want to think about how the fort would stay empty, how he'd never hear his name said in that one quiet voice, never be able to say thank you for saving their lives, for finding Will, for... for everything.

He felt the familiar prickling behind his eyes and knew it was now or never. Like ripping off a bandaid, he pulled the sleeve up.

When it was red, he hadn't told anybody. He tried to keep his wrist hidden because he already knew what it meant, since it was only after he'd started blushing and feeling slightly sick to his stomach whenever Eleven was around, which of course was all the time, that that little red tally mark showed up. Fine, so he'd met his soulmate. But that didn't mean the feeling was mutual. But then when it turned black the next day, and he noticed a tiny matching black mark just below an 011, he knew there was no way he would ever show the guys.

But now? Now it didn't mean getting teased because you were only twelve and you'd met your soulmate and ooh when are you getting married.

Now it meant something entirely different, something that made him want to yell at the top of his lungs.

It was still black.

It wasn't a scar.

It. Was. Still. BLACK.

She was alive. She was alive! He was sounding like a broken record even in his own thoughts as he paced back and forth across his bedroom floor, his heart racing and adrenaline coursing through every vein.

He'd hoped it hadn't been true. He knew she couldn't be gone forever. But days had turned into weeks and weeks had turned into over a month and even he'd had to realize that maybe she wasn't coming back.

But he'd been wrong! She was still out there! Where had she been for

a month? Was she alone? Was she safe?

He stopped in his tracks as a chill ran down his spine.

Could she still be in... that place? She'd closed the gate in the school so was she trapped inside? Was that thing still alive? If she'd survived, was it still alive too? Hunting her down?

He squeezed his eyes shut. There were too many questions. He needed help. He reached for the supercomm. All that mattered was she was alive. All they had to do now was find her.